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(Rādha) Satta Sutta

The (Rādha) Discourse on the Stuck | S 23.2
 Theme: On the Pali *satta* as “being” and as “stuck”
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Overview

1.1 SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

1.1.1 The (Rādha) Satta Sutta (S 23.2)

The **(Rādha) Satta Sutta** records the monk Rādha asking the Buddha about what a “being” (*satta*) is [§2] and the rest of the Sutta is the Buddha’s answer [§§3-15]. The first part of the Buddha’s answer comprises a reflection on the 5 aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.¹ [§§3-7]

1.1.2 “Stuck to the aggregates”

This first section of the Sutta—“Stuck to the aggregates”—may be read as a **reflection** at the beginning of our regular puja or daily quiet period. Then, at the end of the session, we can read the closing teaching, on letting go of the aggregates [§§10-15]. The “mud-house” parable [§§8-9] is optional: it may or may not be read or reflected on in between.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 Meaning of *satta* as “stuck”

1.2.1.1 In the section, “**Stuck to the aggregates**” [§§3-7], each of the 5 aggregates [1.1.1] is reflected on as arising from being “stuck” (*satta*) to it. We will now briefly examine what this means [1.2.1.2] and how this is applied to each of the 5 aggregates [1.2.1.3].

1.2.1.2 Rādha, an old brahmin of Sāvattihī, who, neglected by his family, renounced in old age,² already knows the ordinary, worldly, meaning of *satta*, which is “a being.” Understandably, he wants to know its higher or “Dhamma” meaning.

The “Dhamma” meaning of *satta*—that is, we exist as “beings”—in the sense that whenever we have any kind of desire for form (the body), feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness, we will be “stuck” to it. This means that we keep on desiring for it, without any avenue for respite, much less escape from it. [§§3-7].

Technically, every time we have “any desire, any lust, any delight, any craving” for our body, our feeling, our perception, our formations, or our consciousness, we create karma. In other words, we *become* that aggregate: we end up as that body, that feeling, that perception, those formations, or that consciousness.

¹ For detailed studies on each of the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.

² For details on Rādha, see SD 45.16 (3.1.2). On his arhathood, see **(Arahatta) Rādha S** (S22.71), SD 80.11.

1.2.1.3 For this reason—our desire feeds the aggregates, and they, in turn, fire us up with having more desire—we end up like a snake (the uroboros) eating its own tail. While we seem to be enjoying it, “having” something to feed on, we “are” really suffering from the resulting pain. By pain (*dukkha*) here is meant the unsatisfactoriness of the experiences and the dissatisfaction that persists in our lives.

Technically, **form** (*rūpa*) is the *physical* aspect of our being: we are nothing but the 4 elements (earth, water, fire and wind) all in a constant flux, just like the external elements. All (*sabba*) that we can experience and know are what our faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue and body present to the mind.

Whenever we have such an experience, **feeling** (*vedanā*) arises to colour or cloud it. We judge it *affectively* as being pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. This value-judgement is projected by **perception** (*saññā*) which works on “recognizing” their *perceived* quality based on and biased by our memories and biases. We measure our present by past standards, and keep reliving the past by our biases.

Once we perceive or recognize an experience in this manner, we react *conatively* to desire more of what we see as pleasant, reject what we see as unpleasant, ignore what appears as neither. **Formations** (*saṅkhārā*) of karmic potential grip us tenaciously as greed, hate and delusion. Greed is reinforced every time we desire the pleasant; hate is reinforced whenever we reject the unpleasant; ignorance (the root of delusion) is reinforced whenever we ignore the impermanence of the whole process. This is how the 3 roots of unwholesome karma (*akusala, mūla*) arise.

Finally, there is the *cognitive* process that is like the incessant flow of electrical current that powers all that we are. It is like the ever-present stage on which the drama with the 5 aggregates as leading actors play out a magical illusion that we are caught up with. This is what really goes on in our mind, which sustains and shapes our whole life—all because we cling to the 5 aggregates. That is why they are called **the 5 aggregates of clinging**. This clinging refers to our being “stuck” to the aggregates because of craving.

1.2.2 The mud-house parable

1.2.2.1 The (Rādhā) Satta Sutta is highlighted with **the parable of the mud-house** [§§8-9], where young children play with mud-houses or, if you like, sand-castles. The parable has two parts. In the first [§8], the children enjoy or like the mud-houses they are building and playing with. In the second part [§9], they stop enjoying it and destroy the mud-houses.

1.2.2.2 The meaning of the second part of the parable is elaborated in the Sutta’s closing section [§§10-15], where the Buddha teaches that we should “destroy” the 5 aggregates [1.2.1.3] by removing the lust for any of them. This means that we should not get “stuck” (*satta*) with them, that is, seeing them as something lasting and permanent. They are all of the nature to change; hence, to be unsatisfactory. Being impermanent and unsatisfactory, they are necessarily non-self, that is, without any abiding essence.³

The Sutta closes with the Buddha declaring that “the cessation of craving is nirvana.” [§15]. The cessation of craving (*taṇha-k, khaya*) is a synecdoche (shorthand) for the destruction of the mental influxes, that is, those of sensual lust (*kān’āsava*), of existence (*bhav’āsava*) and of ignorance (*avijjāsava*).⁴ One who has destroyed all these influxes is known as an arhat.

2 How Rādhā becomes a monk

³ See **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2: see esp §§12-16.

⁴ SD 30.3 (1.3.2). Better known is the later set of 4 influxes or “floods” (*ogha*) or “yokes” (*yoga*), which has “the influx of views” (*diṭṭh’āsava*) as the 3rd influx, and that of ignorance as the 4th: **Ogha Pañha S** (S 38.11) SD 30.3(1.4); D 16,10.4 n (SD 9). On the relationship between influxes (*āsava*) and fetters (*saṃyojana*), see SD 30.3 (1.3.3).

Personal details of the elder Rādhā can be found elsewhere.⁵ This background story of the elder Rādhā is from **the Dhammapada Commentary** (DhA 6.1).

SD 52.2e(2)

Rādhā-t,thera Vatthu

The Story of the Elder Rādhā • DhA 6.1/2:104-108 (Dh 76)

- 1 ***Nidhīnaṃ va pavattāraṃ'ti***, “as a shower of treasures” (Dh 76).
- 2 This Dharma-teaching was given by the Teacher when he was staying in Jeta,vana [Jeta’s grove] with reference to the venerable Rādhā.⁶
- 3 It is said that when Rādhā was a householder (layman) brahmin (*gīhi*) in Sāvattihī.⁷ Thinking, “Let me live with the monks,” he went to the monastery and lived there, performing various duties such as cutting grass, sweeping the cells, and preparing water for washing the mouth and face.⁸
- 4 The monks treated him well, but were not willing to accept him into the order. As a result he grew thin.
- 5 One day, early at dawn, the Teacher surveyed the world, and seeing the brahmin, wondered what would become of him. Perceiving that he would become an arhat, he went, in the evening, as it were,⁹ on a tour of inspecting the monastery.
- 6 Approaching the brahmin, he asked, “Brahmin, what are you doing, going about here?” “Performing the major and minor duties for the monks, bhante.” [105]
- 7 “Do they here treat you kindly?” “Yes. Bhante. I receive enough food, but they are not willing to accept me into the order.”
- 8 Accordingly, the Teacher assembled the community of monks and asked them about the matter: “Bhikshus, is there anyone here who remembers any act of merit (*adhikāra*)¹⁰ of this brahmin?”
- 9 The elder Sāriputta said, “Bhante, I remember it. When I was on my almsround in Rājagaha, he himself gave me a ladleful of almsfood.¹¹ I recall this act of merit of his.”
- 10 The Teacher said, “Sāriputta, is it not proper to remove the suffering of one who has done such a service?” “Very well, bhante. I will let him go forth,” and accordingly admitted him into the order.

⁵ For details on Rādhā, see SD 45.16 (3.1.2).

⁶ For details on the elder Rādhā, see SD 51.15 (1.2.1.3).

⁷ Other Comys say he was from Rājagaha (AA 1:328; ThaA 1:12). He prob was from Rājagaha but left for Sāvattihī to seek refuge in the monastery at Jeta,vana.

⁸ “Mouth and face,” *mukha*, is polysemous here, meaning “mouth” (Sn 608, 1022; J 2:7; DA 1:287; cf *uttāna*~, “clear-mouth,” easy to understand) and “face” (*adho*~, “facing down,” V 2:78; *assu*~, “with tearful face,” Dh 67, PvA 39; *dum*~, sad or unfriendly looking,” J 2:393, 6:343, “scurrilous,” J 5:78; *bhadra*~, “bright-faced, fortunate looking,” PvA 149; *ruda*~, “crying,” Pv 1:11.2; J 6:218; PvA 74, 75, 77; *~m karoti*, “make a face, grimace,” Vism 343): both senses apply here. For other senses, see PED: mukha.

⁹ The Buddha is not “feigning” the tour, but rather not announcing his intention. Whatever skillful means (*upāya*) the Buddha employs, even his routine daily acts, he would never lie. Duplicity has no part in true *upāya*: see SD 10.16 (3.5.3); SD 30.8 (5.3); SD 43.6 (2.3.4).

¹⁰ “Act of merit, *adhikāra*: B 2:59 = SnA 48,16*, 49,13' (= *adhika-kāro*, syn *pariccāgo*; qu Sāra,saṅgaha 3,13), 51,4*; Ap 270,28, 589,15 f; V 1:55,32, 273,14-278,24.

¹¹ *Ayaṃ me rājagahe piṇḍāya carantassa attano abhihaṭṭaṃ kaṭacchu,bhikkhaṃ [vī bhattāṃ] dāpesi.*

11 He was given a seat in the refectory in the outer circle of seats. However, even with rice-porridge and other foods, he grew weary. The elder took him along on his almsround, and constantly admonished him, saying: “You should do this. You should not do that.”

12 The monk was amenable and quick to learn.¹² So he practised as instructed. In but a few days, he attained arhathood.¹³

13 The elder brought him to the Teacher, saluted the Teacher, and sat down. Then, the Teacher welcomed him and said, “Sāriputta, is your pupil amenable?”

“Yes, bhante, he is very amenable. No matter what fault I mention, he does not resent.” **[106]**

14 “Sāriputta, if you could have pupils like this monk, how many would you have?”

“I would have as many as I could get, bhante!”¹⁴

15 Now, one day, a discussion arose in the Dharma-hall:

“They say the elder Sāriputta is grateful and thankful. When a poor brahmin gave him but a ladleful of almsfood, he remembered his kindness and made¹⁵ a monk of him.

16 As for the elder Rādha, he was very patient of admonition.”

17 The Teacher, hearing this talk, said, “Bhikshus, this is not the first time that Sāriputta has shown himself grateful and thankful. He showed it in a previous life, too.”

18 And to proclaim his meaning, he related **the Alīna,citta Jātaka** (J 156), elaborated in the Book of Twos (*duka nipāta*), as follows:

Because of Alīna,citta,¹⁶ a mighty number was routed:
he captured alive the general of Kosala, dissatisfied with his army.
Even so, a monk, who has gained tutelage, is diligent in effort,¹⁷
by cultivating good qualities, by the attainment of the state free from bondage,
will progressively bring about the destruction of all the fetters.¹⁸ (J 156/2:17-23)

19 Said the Teacher, “The elder Sāriputta was at that time a lone elephant who presented the pure albino elephant, his son, to the carpenters, in recognition of their service in healing his foot.”

20 Having thus related the Jātaka about the elder Sāriputta, he then said with reference to the elder Rādha:

“Bhikshus, when a fault is pointed out to a monk, he ought to be amenable like Rādha, and when admonished, he should not take offence.

21 Indeed, he who gives admonition should be looked upon as one who points out where treasures are to be found.”

22 So saying, **[107]**, he showed the connection and, instructing them in the Dharma, pronounced this stanza:

¹² *So suvaco ahoṣi padakkhiṇa-g,gahī.*

¹³ *Tasmā yathā'nusiṭṭhaṃ paṭipajjamāno katipāhan'eva arahattaṃ pāpunī.*

¹⁴ *Bhante bahuke gaṇheyyam evāti.*

¹⁵ “Grateful and thankful,” *kataññū kata,vedī*, ie, acknowledges a good done to one, and joyfully reciprocates accordingly. See **Kataññū Kata,vedī S** (A 2.11.2), SD 3.1(1.4.4).

¹⁶ Alīna,citta, king of Benares, was the Bodhisattva himself (the Buddha in a past life).

¹⁷ *Evaṃ nissaya,sampannaṃ bhikkhu āradha,viriyo.*

¹⁸ *Pāpuṇeyyānupubbena sabba,sāmyojana-k,khayan'ti.*

<p><i>Nidhīnaṃ va pavattāraṃ yaṃ passe vajja,dassināṃ niggayha,vādiṃ medhāvīṃ tādisaṃ paṇḍitaṃ bhaje tādisaṃ bhajamānassa seyyo hoti na pāpiyo'ti</i></p>	<p>(Dh 76)</p>	<p>One should see a shower of faults as a shower of treasures, the wise who speaks by way of rebuke— let one associate with such a wise one. For, associating with such a one, one becomes better, not worse.</p>	<p><i>b</i> <i>a</i></p>
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Rādha-t,therassa vatthu • The story of the elder Rādha

3 Related suttas

3.1 THE GUH'AṬṬHAKA SUTTA (Sn 4.2)

3.1.1 The Eights on the Cave

The **Guh'aṭṭhaka Sutta** (Sn 4.2) has this verse with a play on *satta*:

<p><i>Satto guhāyaṃ bahunābhicchanno tiṭṭhaṃ naro mohanasmim pagāḷho dure vivekā hi tathā'vidho so kāmaṃ hi loke na hi suppahāyā</i></p>	<p>(Sn 772)</p>	<p>Stuck in the cave (that is the body), covered with many (defilements),¹⁹ a man remains immersed in delusion. For, such a one is far from (mental) solitude; for, sensual pleasures are hard to remove in the world.</p>
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3.1.2 The Commentaries on *satta*

3.1.2.1 The Niddesa, the ancient commentary on the Sutta Nipāta, explains *satto guhāyaṃ*, “stuck in the cave (that is the body)” (Sn 772a), with a register of synonyms and near-synonyms: “In the phrase, *satto guhāyaṃ*, one is stuck, stuck fast, hanging on to, attached, attaching, held back ... ‘being attached’ is a designation for *satta*” (***satto guhāyan'ti guhāyaṃ satto visatto āsatto laggo laggito palibuddho ... satto'ti lagganādhivacanaṃ*** (Nm 1:23,12-16, 24,3)

The **Sutta Nipāta Commentary** simply glosses *satta* as “stuck” (*atto'ti laggo*, SnA 515,30). Then, it quotes the (Rādha) Satta Sutta.

3.1.2.2 The phrase ***satto guhāyaṃ***, “stuck in the cave,” refers to our being physically attracted or attached to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, imagining or hoping that they can last or stay in the same way. Or, more abstractly, we may be drawn to our form (the body as the sense-faculties or as the 4 elements of earth, water, fire and wind), feeling, perception, formations or consciousness [1.2.1.3].

We feel a false sense of security from such attraction or attachment, as if we are deep in a cave. But the cave also restricts our movement and growth: we may starve to death if we remain therein. Notice that it is said here that we “are stuck” therein. In other words, we only need to seek refuge in a cave, when it is not safe outside, such as when a storm is raging. It may serve as a temporary refuge, but we need to get out of it once the storm has passed. Again here, there is the idea of impermanence.

¹⁹ On the amplified “desires,” see Nm 1:24,4,12-13; SnA 2:515,32. *Abhichanna* prob is a late reading of *abhichanda*: see Sn:N 326 n772, where see further philological details.

3.2 THE VAJIRĀ SUTTA (S 5.10)

3.2.1 The Vajirā Sutta (S 5.10) records an instructive teaching given by the nun Vajirā in response to Māra who appears to her while she is meditating in the Dark Forest after her noon meal, thus:

<p>(1) <i>Kin nu satto'ti paccesi māra, diṭṭhi, gataṃ nu te suddha, saṅkhāra, puñño yaṃ na-y-idha satt'upalabbhati</i></p>	<p>553</p>	<p>What “being” is there that you assume? How you have fallen into views, Māra! It is a <u>mere heap of conditioned states</u>: here no being is to be found.</p>
<p>(2) <i>Yathā hi aṅga, sambhārā hoti saddo ratho ti evaṃ khandhaṃ santesu hoti satto ti sammuti</i></p>	<p>554</p>	<p>Just as with parts assembled together we have the word “chariot,” even so, when there are the aggregates, there is the convention of a “being.”</p>
<p>(3) <i>Dukkham eva hi sambhoti dukkhaṃ tiṭṭhati veti ca nāññatra dukkhā sambhoti nāññam dukkhā nirujjhati.</i></p>	<p>555</p>	<p>Only suffering comes into being; only suffering stands and passes away. Other than suffering, nothing comes to be; other than suffering, nothing ceases.</p>

(S 553-555*/5.10/1:135), SD 102.13; SD 17.6 (6.2.2)

3.2.2 This reflection, by a well-trained nun practitioner, is based on the teaching of **non-self** (*anattā*). The non-self characteristic is about the reality that there is no abiding essence in anything. All events—in fact, all things in this universe—are conditioned, that is, arise and fall as a network of causes and effects interacting with one another. What we call a “**being**” (*satta*) is just that, “a mere heap of conditioned states” [S 553c].

The word, “being” is just a convention (*sammuti*), a commonly accepted convenient term for this complex of body and mind: it’s just a word like “chariot” which refers to an assembly of parts of a kind of vehicle. This is the language of the world, used for the sake of common convenience. This is an implicit language, whose sense “needs to be teased out” (*neyy’attha*).

On a higher level, there is the language of Dhamma, an explicit language, whose sense is quite direct, as far as it is possible for language. This is the language of **S 555**, where Vajirā states that “only suffering” arises, stands and passes away, nothing else. Or, we can say that anything else is our imagination, a deluded state of affairs.

Dhamma language is explicit; it “has been drawn out” (*nīt’attha*). It is a kind of “right knowledge,” which means that we still need to understand it, awaken to it—in other words, to *internalize* through personal experience and realization. For this reason, we need to constantly study the suttas, reflect its truth within and without ourself, and see it for ourself as a living experience.

3.3 OTHER RELATED SUTTAS

There are at least 3 other related suttas that centre on the word *satta*:²⁰

<p>(Rādha) Satta Sutta</p>	<p>S 23.2/3:189 f</p>	<p>SD 52.2e</p>	<p>on <i>satta</i> as “being” and as “stuck”</p>
<p>(Udāna) Satta Sutta 1</p>	<p>U 7.3/63/75</p>	<p>SD 52.2f</p>	<p>we are fettered to sense-desires</p>
<p>(Udāna) Satta Sutta 2</p>	<p>U 7.4/64/75 f</p>	<p>SD 52.2g</p>	<p>we are caught in sense-desires □</p>

²⁰ See SD 52.2 (4.1).

(Rādha) Satta Sutta

The (Rādha) Discourse on the Stuck

S 23.2

1 At Sāvattthī.

Rādha's question

2 Sitting at one side, the venerable Rādha said to the Blessed One [190]:
 “A being (*satta*)! A being! Bhante, in what way is one called a being?”

Stuck to the aggregates

(1) *Rūpe kho rādha, yo chando yo rāgo yā nandi yā taṇhā, tatra satto tatra visatto tasmā satto'ti vuccati.*

3 “Whenever, Radha, there is any desire, any lust, any delight, any craving, for **form**, then, therein²¹ one is stuck (*satta*), stuck fast (*visatta*)—therefore, one is called a ‘being’!

(2) *Vedanāya yo chando yo rāgo yā nandi yā taṇhā, tatra satto tatra visatto tasmā satto'ti vuccati.*

4 Whenever there is any desire, any lust, any delight, any craving, for **feeling**, then, therein one is stuck, stuck fast—therefore, one is called a ‘being’!

(3) *Saññāya yo chando yo rāgo yā nandi yā taṇhā, tatra satto tatra visatto tasmā satto'ti vuccati.*

5 “Whenever there is any desire, any lust, any delight, any craving, for **perception**, then, therein one is stuck, stuck fast—therefore, one is called a ‘being’!

(4) *Saṅkhāresu yo chando yo rāgo yā nandi yā taṇhā, tatra satto tatra visatto tasmā satto'ti vuccati.*

6 Whenever there is any desire, any lust, any delight, any craving, for **mental formations**, then, therein one is stuck, stuck fast—therefore, one is called a ‘being’!

(5) *Viññāṇe yo chando yo rāgo yā nandi yā taṇhā, tatra satto tatra visatto tasmā satto'ti vuccati.*

7 Whenever there is any desire, any lust, any delight, any craving, for **consciousness**, then, therein one is stuck, stuck fast—therefore, one is called a ‘being’!

The mud-house parable

8 Suppose, Rādha, young boys or young girls are playing with mud-houses,²² and so long as they are not free from lust, not free from desire, not free from love, not free from thirst, not free from fever, not free from craving, for their mud-houses,²³

²¹ “Then, therein,” *tatra* as polysemous.

²² *Seyyathā'pi rādha, kumārakā vā kumārikāyo [Ce Se kumāriyo vā] vā paṃsv-āgārakehi kīlanti. Paṃsv-āgāraka = paṃsu, “dust, dirt” + āgāra(ka), “(tiny) building” = gharaka (SA 2:336). PED errs in its def. Paṃsvāgāraka often occurs in Comys (eg VA 6:1239). Paṃsvāgāra, kīlana appears in DA 2:635 (ad D 17). Although it is tempting to tr *paṃsvāgāraka* as “sandcastle,” the context here is more likely to be “mud-house,” since *paṃsu* is “dust, mud,” while “sand” is *pulina*, as in *pulina, cetiya*, “sand-shrine” (Ap 484.4/2:426, 495.8+11; ApA 385; ThaA 2:16). However, “sandcastle” as a further figure is helpful here when explaining the metaphor.*

then, they are fond of them, they play with them, they treasure them, [they compare them,] they are possessive of them.²⁴

9 But, Rādha, when those young boys or young girls are free from lust, free from desire, free from love, free from thirst, free from fever, free from craving, for their mud-houses, then, they will destroy the mud-houses with their hands and feet, knock them down, scatter them, cease to play with them.²⁵

Letting go of the aggregates

10 Even so, Rādha, destroy your **form**, knock it down, scatter it, cease to play with it—practise for the destruction of craving.²⁶

11 Destroy your **feeling**, knock it down, scatter it, cease to play with it—practise for the destruction of craving.

12 Destroy your **perception**, knock it down, scatter it, cease to play with it—practise for the destruction of craving.

13 Destroy your **formations**, knock them down, scatter them, cease to play with them—practise for the destruction of craving.

14 Destroy your **consciousness**, knock it down, scatter it, cease to play with it—practise for the destruction of craving.

15 For, Rādha, the cessation of craving is nirvana.²⁷

— evaṃ —

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²³ *Yāvakivañ ca tesu paṃsv-āgārakesu avigata, rāgā* [Se avīta- throughout] *honti avigata-c, chandā avigata, pemā avigata, pipāsā avigata, pariḷhā avigata, taṇhā*.

²⁴ *Tāva tāni paṃsv-āgārakāni allīyanti kelāyanti dhanāyanti mamāyanti* [Be Ce; Ee Se *manāyanti mamāyanti*]. Comy glosses *dhanāyanti* as *dhanam viya maññanti*, “they regard it as a treasure” (SA 2:336).

²⁵ *Atha kho tāni paṃsv-āgārakāni hatthehi ca pādehi ca vikiranti vidhamanti viddhamsethi vikiḷanikam karonti*.

²⁶ *Evam eva kho rādha, tumbhepi rūpaṃ vikiratha vidhamatha viddhamsetha vikiḷanikam karotha taṇha-k, khayāya paṭipajjatha*.

²⁷ *Taṇha-k, khayō hi rādha nibbānan’ti*.